

Grazing in Forests



Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry

Permitting grazing in the woods offers only one real benefit to livestock (shade) but has many drawbacks:

- Continuously grazed woodlands offer little or no nutrition
- Cattle can be poisoned from feeding on red-oak acorns and wilted cherry leaves
- Grazing compacts soil and exposes it to erosion
- Livestock destroy wildlife cover and compete for food
- Grazing lowers timber value (wood stain, decay, brittleness, warping, and slowed tree growth due to soil compaction and root damage)
- Grazing tends to eliminate desirable forest tree reproduction

Deer and turkey cope well with grazing because they have few predators and can travel long distances. Small and non-game species suffer from lack of cover in heavily grazed areas.

Options include:

1. Fence livestock out entirely
2. Put the fence 30 feet into the woods to allow shading for livestock
3. Fence (a) small enclave(s) of 5-10 white oak and hickory (harmless to cattle) for shade
4. Make "cover islands" in grazed woods by fencing areas 50-60 feet across, then planting wildlife food/cover plants or allowing the areas to grow back naturally
5. Create "tree barns" by planting (a) small grove(s) of trees in the pasture
6. Run fewer head of livestock
7. Rotate grazing

Grazing rotations can vary from every week to every season. If seasonal, consider establishing warm and cool season pastures. The goal in woodland rotational grazing should be to graze vegetation to no less than six or eight inches tall.